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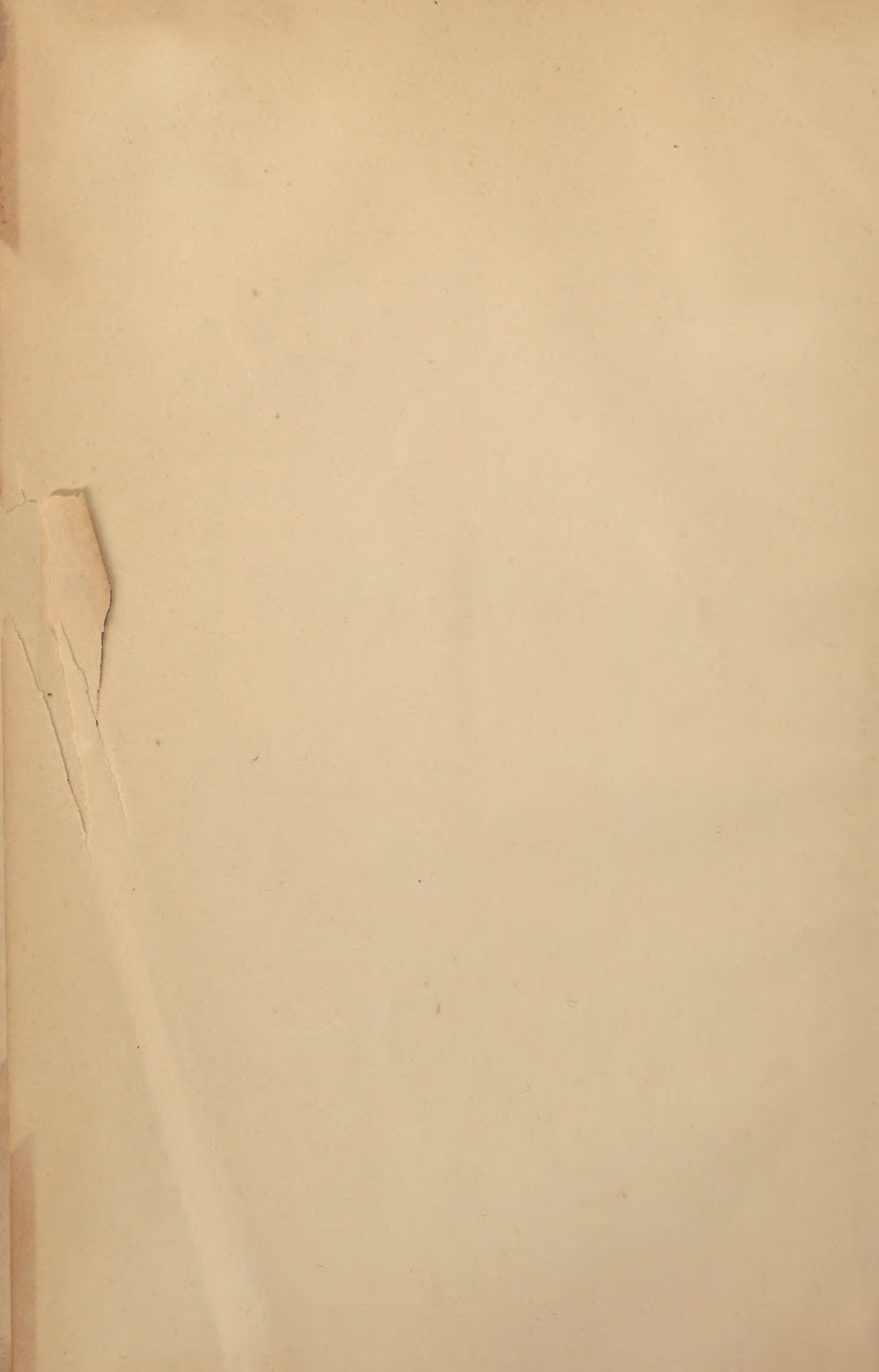


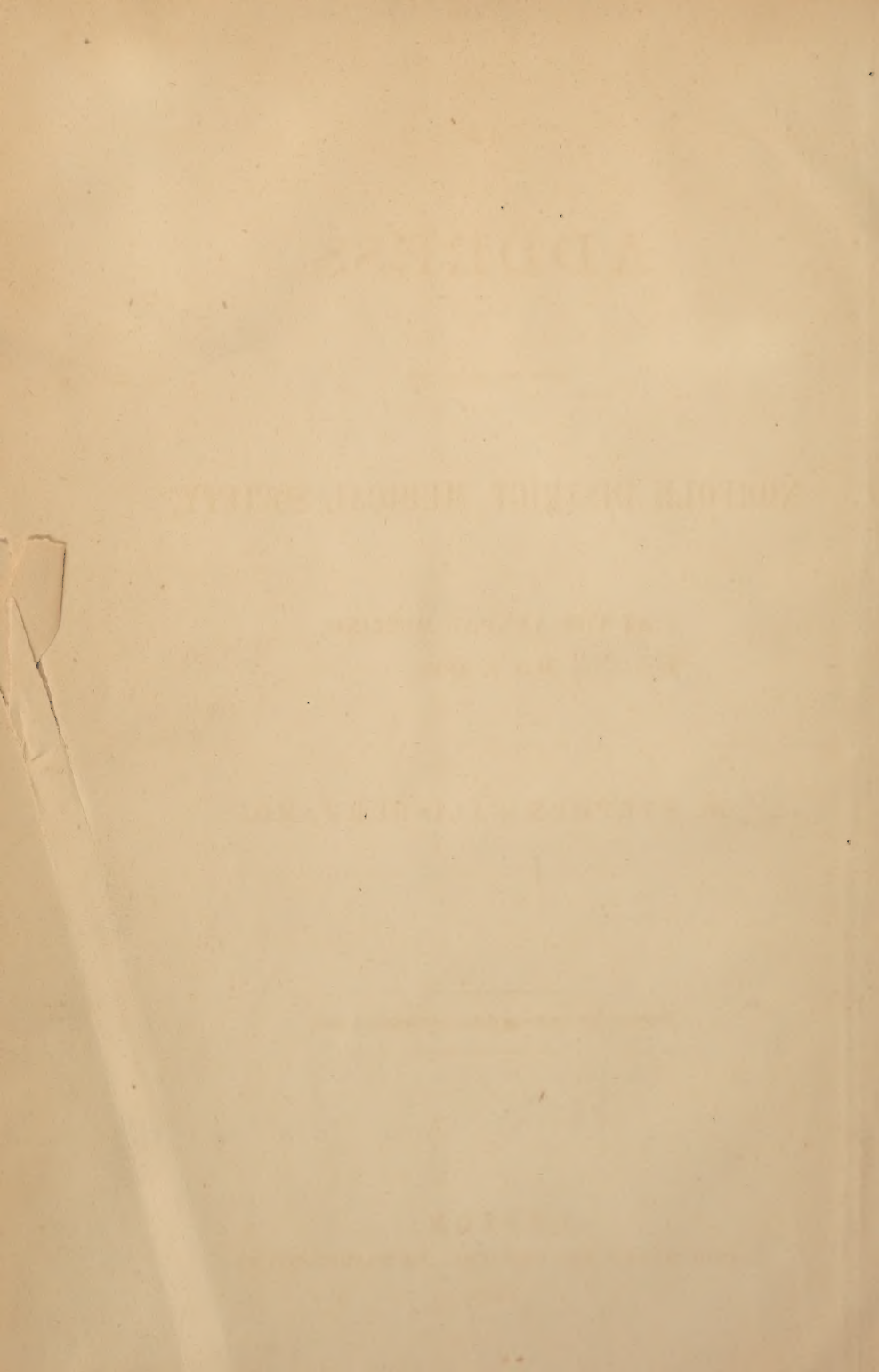
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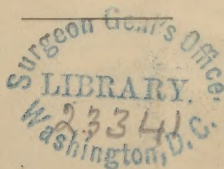
NORFOLK DISTRICT MEDICAL SOCIETY,

AT THE ANNUAL MEETING,

MAY 8, 1866,

BY STEPHEN SALISBURY, M.D.

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PERHAPS I ought to apologize for appearing before a society of well educated and accomplished physicians with a subject upon which they are undoubtedly as well, and possibly better informed than myself.

Addressing some more experienced, to whom my remarks may appear trite and familiar; others whose education has been more recent, and who are capable of giving me instruction upon sciences which have been developed within a few years; I must expect to be criticized, and I have no wish that it should be otherwise.

As a profession, may we not be congratulated that we are not always travelling in the same routine; that some of the errors by which we were impeded in our earlier practice have been corrected by the more extended use of the improved mechanical means, as the microscope, laryngoscope, and ophthalmoscope, and other advanced methods of investigation; that we have been permitted to learn something, as we believe, of caution if not of more successful practice, even from the absurdities of the various isms and new systems of which so many have been presented to the world within the last thirty years.

Is there not reason for congratulation that there have been advances in knowledge of pathology, and improvements in the management of some of the most fatal diseases; that consumption, or as it is now termed, tuberculosis, which was treated with mercury in

the early part of this century, the pathology of which was so much illustrated by the researches of Laennec and Louis and their disciples, has been recently still more elucidated, so as to correct some important errors which were inferred from their discoveries. When it was first discovered that tubercles accompanied almost every case of chronic disease of the lungs which proved fatal, it seemed to be a necessary inference that in them consisted the disease, and that to get rid of them if possible should be the only object of treatment.

But more recently it has been acknowledged that tubercles are but the local manifestation of a morbid process which has its origin elsewhere; and that they are only secondary to a constitutional affection which may not only be often recognized, and met with appropriate treatment, but still more frequently prevented, by correcting habitual errors of life, which inevitably tend to produce it. Some of our best authorities say that tubercle cannot be cured by any remedy, but good habitual precautions may prevent its development.

Chambers thinks that a single deposit of tubercle may almost always be recovered from; but that it is the tendency to the formation of it which we have to guard against, chiefly by improvement in the habits of life.

Insanity is another disease, the frequency of which may be attributed to the social customs which have been developed by the advance of civilization. It has been said, with how much truth I know not, that no instance of insanity was ever known amongst the aborigines of this or any other country. Dr. Noble has remarked, that the more advanced the civilization of any community, the more abundant are the cases of insanity. That new diseases are the inevitable results of civilization, we are certainly not prepared to acknowledge. Is it not, then, a part of our duty as physicians to discover why it is that these and other diseases have originated or are made more numerous by civilization? It is true, that few individuals have the power, and a very few have the resolution, to put in force the various preventive checks of disease, and thus attain a green old age; but the great mass of society must be contented to make the best compromise they can with the evils that surround them: but it is not less incumbent upon us to direct the way, even if we are fully aware that but very few will be influenced to yield obedience to the rules which may be arrived at. It is of some of the habits of social life, which have so great an influence upon the welfare of our race, that I propose to speak to-day;—not that I am by any means confident that I have arrived at the whole truth in regard to any of them, but I am convinced of the importance of keeping the profession continually active in investigating such agencies.

At the time when the quota of our State for service in the Union army was being filled, some astonishment was expressed at the large number of conscripts who did not come up to the requirements of the examining surgeons. It was replied that the number of those re-

jected did not exceed the proportion of those found unfit in other countries where similar restrictions were exercised. Whether this was true or not, it certainly was the fact, that many were exempt on account of various disabilities, which although not rendering them incapable of the ordinary avocations of life, must detract much from happiness, usefulness and longevity.

It is surely, then, quite as important a subject for the consideration of our profession, how the number of these disabilities, as well as of some chronic diseases may be diminished, and to what they may be attributed, as to decide whether the continuance of diseases may or may not be abridged by active treatment in the early stages.

You will say, perhaps, that many of these disabilities are hereditary. This, if true, only removes the question further back; and admitting its truth, it is only a consequence of what might have been avoided or improved before in previous generations.

A highly respected authority, Mr. Chambers, has said that very much more than one half of those who leave this life die from imperfect nutrition, and more than one half of those who recover from disease gain that end by restoration of their digestive functions. The freshest air and purest water will be no protection from disease and death, unless the food with which the human system is supplied is possessed of the elements which are necessary for the maintenance of those forces which result in life. Hence, it must be acknowledged that the question as to what we shall eat is deserving of our consideration, although it may not be in accordance with the strict letter of the Scripture injunction. This question, as to what constitutes the best food for man, in all the various conditions of life, is still far from being fully solved. It is my belief, however, that we use much more animal food than is necessary or promotive of our best condition, and that many diseases would be avoided if it were less abundantly supplied; and have we not had abundant evidence of late years that even an army may be starved on an excessive diet of beef? I am not a vegetarian, and am well aware that man, when entirely uncultivated and guided only by that instinct which is sufficient to preserve and increase his race, depends very largely upon meat. Individual constitutions, it is acknowledged, may require a large proportion of meat; also those whose habits and avocations keep them active much of the time in the open air. Yet it is equally true, that many have passed long lives, free from disease, who have used but an extremely limited quantity of animal food. In the large cities and countries of Europe, where the price of meat is so high and wages so low that the laboring class can afford meat but rarely, they possess quite as much, and I think more, muscular strength and apparent health than the same class in this country, who *think* they require meat two or three times a day. I have seen a robust tender of masons taking his dinner of bread and grapes with as much satisfaction as if it had been roast beef, and apparently with as much

benefit from it. Men may be starved on beef alone (as was proved in the Crimea), not less than on arrowroot or corn-starch.

Perhaps of equal importance to the inquiry what we shall eat, is that as to the manner in which it shall be prepared. The subject of cooking deserves much more attention than it has received; and it was well timed that our friend, the Secretary of this Society, has recently drawn the attention of the public to it. I hope he will not let the subject rest until his efforts have resulted in some practical remedy for the amelioration of the evils of bad cookery. The disregard in which it has been held was apparently once sanctioned, if not encouraged, by the stoical resolution of our Puritan progenitors to neglect everything which had the appearance of ministering to the appetite. Whatever the cause, it is evident that *despatch* in the preparation as well as in the disposing of food, has been and still is too much aimed at. It has been said, with some truth, by a recent writer, that we are the worst cooks and the most unwholesome feeders in the world. He thinks that our nervous unrest is to be attributed in a great measure to the universal pie. We must admit this, at least in part. There is no doubt that pie and fried food constitute a very popular, and to housekeepers a very convenient method of supplying food. Doughnuts, pancakes, fritters and the various fried meats and vegetables form too large a proportion of our diet. With these fascinating dishes, our people are tempted to eat more than they require, and too much vital force is expended in the process of digestion. We hear more every year, from pathologists, of the morbid conditions of the blood as a cause of disease, and especially of late, in the fear of an approach of a fearful epidemic. It is not surprising that the fluids should be morbid, when formed of such indigestible if not pernicious materials as we have alluded to.

The hasty manner in which we consume our food, and which is almost universal, even with those who do not know what to do with themselves after the meal is completed, seems to originate in a national characteristic which has been chiefly instrumental in our pre-eminence as efficient business men—that of doing everything with despatch. Thus a rapid disposal of food has often been supposed to be an indication of a smart and enterprising individual, and I have even heard farmers say that they did not wish any better evidence of a good workman, than to see him get through his meals quickly. This, however, is a serious evil, and leads to indigestion, to imperfect nutrition, and this to various chronic diseases of which thousands die every year. *Edere oportet ut vivas, non vivere ut edas.* Yet eating is an important essential of living, and the manner is not less important.

After swallowing a meal without the necessary mastication, instead of yielding obedience to a natural tendency to rest, which man has in common with other animals, we are apt to hasten too soon to our work, and thus the process which the stomach has to accomplish,

requiring an additional flow of blood to that organ and an expenditure of nervous power, goes on with more difficulty when the means of its support, the nervous influence and the blood, are directed elsewhere.

In considering the subject of food, we should not overlook the remarkable tendency of man to partake of nervous stimulants. The extent to which substances may be taken with impunity which affect the nervous system, has long been an unsettled question; and however it may be decided, there is no doubt that one of the most terrible scourges of the human race is the tendency to indulge to excess in alcoholic beverages. There are, perhaps, some here who will feel that a total abstinence from these beverages is not warranted by the sound conclusion of science; but all must acknowledge the value of the abundance of facts which have been adduced to demonstrate that alcoholic liquors are not necessary for the maintenance of health and strength. In regard to their use in *disease*, there is a marked difference in comparing the practice and precepts of medical men twenty-five years ago and at the present time. When I was one of the resident pupils at the Massachusetts General Hospital, our headquarters was in the apothecary's room, and we were necessarily acquainted with the comparative quantities of different articles used. I am quite sure that the amount of brandy and gin (whiskey had not been introduced then) used for all the patients in the Hospital did not exceed two gallons in the year. I do not know what the practice there is now, but it is certainly very different in private practice. There has evidently been a great change in the practice of physicians in prescribing the use of alcohol in some form. It would be absurd to deny that stimulants of this nature possess a power as remedial agents which could not be supplied from any other source. Even the use of it as an article of diet may be continued for a long time with apparent impunity, when in many instances it is actually laying the foundation for some chronic disease, or for the rapidly fatal result of some acute one.

As in medical practice, so in social life, the amount of alcohol used has increased to a degree not easily estimated. Is it not an important question how far the medical profession are responsible, by prescribing alcohol as a medicine, for this change in the habit of using it? I hope that no one of us will make himself liable to the criticism which I have heard pronounced upon an eminent physician who closed his career in the earliest part of this century, whose practice was more conformed to the present than to the time in which he lived. It has been remarked in regard to him, that he was a very successful physician, but made many drunkards. He never used the lancet, but depended chiefly on fomentations and stimulants to meet acute inflammation. He was very popular for a long time, but when the grand discovery was made that mercury was to cure all diseases, not excepting consumption, he was superseded by those who were specially acquainted with the use of that then reputed panacea.

It may be considered entirely superfluous, at this day, when the subjects of ventilation, pure air, and the necessity of ablution have been on the tongues of a large portion of the people in connection with the anticipated approach of cholera, for me to say anything with regard to them. As a general rule, the American or New England people have *always* been in advance with regard to the appreciation of fresh air and the avoiding of all sources of uncleanness. It is not so, however, we all know, with all of our citizens, and many require frequent supervision in this respect. I met with a striking illustration of the evil influence of the neglect of the sanitary laws with regard to the renewal of air and of cleanly habits in an epidemic of cerebro-spinal meningitis, which occurred near the limits of Brookline and Roxbury in the course of last winter.

Nearly all the cases which I saw were residents in rooms which were too close, and were lying in bedrooms the air in which was repulsive from the odor of the clothing and human exhalations, to an extent which under any circumstances would have suggested the fear of poisonous infection, and which rendered the remaining at the bedside long enough to make a proper investigation of the cases an act of self-denial greater than even a physician often has to perform. One of the cases was the owner of a house, and was rejoicing in that degree of prosperity which enabled him to keep pigs in his cellar, and the milkman informed me that before and during the sickness the odor in the house was so disgusting that he could scarcely endure to enter it in order to leave his milk.

Two years since, I was called to visit several members of a family who were suffering from an attack of cholera morbus. Five were attacked simultaneously, and three of the cases were attended with severe pain at the epigastrium, frequent dejections and vomiting, with great depression of strength; all had more or less diarrhœa and vomiting. In searching for the common cause which might have affected them, no article of food could be suspected, unless it was a piece of roast beef of which all had partaken. Upon examining what remained of the beef, I could not discover anything which would warrant the supposition that the disease had been occasioned by it. Some one suggested that nitre, which was said sometimes to have been used in the preservation of fresh beef, and might have been then, as it was hot weather, had been the cause of the malady. But a subsequent discovery of defect in the drainage afforded a more probable cause. In looking into the cellar of the house where the sickness occurred, it was ascertained that a leakage had taken place from the vault into the cellar, and there was some reason to believe that it had affected the water which the family had been using; either of which was evidently sufficient to endanger the health of persons within its influence. The leakage into the cellar, as was stated, had occasioned an offensive odor in the house at times, and I think there is little reason to doubt that it was more instrumental

in producing the disease than the nitre which might have been in the beef. After all, however, there was a mystery about the attacks which was not entirely cleared up, as those who came in to assist the family were more or less affected. Thus it has been, and probably will be in other epidemics, particularly of malignant typhus and dysentery. So large a proportion of them have been traced to some local cause which furnished offensive exhalations, that it is not unreasonable to infer that many may be attributed to or aggravated by this cause.

Among the many influences injuriously affecting health arising out of our social habits and customs, the prevalent method of education forces itself upon us as one of the most prominent. Those who are engaged in it are quite liable to become enthusiastic, and to exceed the limits of prudence in extending its advantages. A recent writer has remarked that a man or boy has *too much* education when in developing his mind he has destroyed the health of his body, and it would seem that the ultimate usefulness of many children in our community has been diminished by inducing them to devote more time to books than was best for their health.

Our public schools are justly the pride and boast of New England; yet is there not reason for the belief that they as well as our colleges are responsible for some of the physical imperfections which we meet with? It was a ludicrous remark of Frederick the Great, that man was more adapted for a postilion than a philosopher, but it is admitted as a serious truth that a high state of intellectual cultivation is rarely attained but at the expense of bodily health.

There is no reason for this being so; the many instances we have had of self-educated men, who have not had the advantages of colleges, furnish sufficient evidence that a high state of intellectual culture and mental vigor may be attained, and at the same time a due share of physical strength to sustain them.

How often do we hear remarks similar to the following, which I quote from a recent sketch of an eminent member of Congress. "It was a great advantage to the subject of our sketch, that in his youth he knew what hard work was; of great *value*, in more ways than one. In the first place it laid the foundation of good health and a sound constitution. Then again it enabled him to understand, far better than he otherwise could, the wants, feelings and peculiar desires of the working people of our land." Are not these of value to a merchant or a professional man as well as to a member of Congress? It will certainly be acknowledged that to a physician such a preparation would be inestimable.

Our schools are too often managed with a belief that the true aim of education is to introduce to the minds of children the greatest amount of knowledge of the various branches taught, and in the most expeditious manner possible, with little regard to the physical capacity and health of the child. By this process the mind may

possibly be improved, yet it is very much to be feared that the result may be not only a deterioration of the mental powers, but likewise a diminution of subsequent usefulness and happiness. Confining scholars to study during five continuous hours of the day in school, and giving them tasks which require two or three hours of study at home, is carrying education to the verge of excess, and inflicting an injury to the physical system of the child, the effect of which it will feel in every future exertion, and exposure during after life, and by which it may perhaps be unfitted for many of the ordinary avocations. When the efforts of the scholars are stimulated by emulation, still more injurious effects may result. The mind is not improved in exact proportion to the number of hours devoted to study, or to the amount of knowledge acquired. It may comprise an arithmetic, a dictionary, a thorough knowledge of Latin and Greek, and yet be very badly prepared for the struggle of life. *Over study* often defeats its object; it causes a kind of atrophy of the brain, or, as Rousseau expresses it, "returns man to his original stupidity." How can this evil be modified or remedied? Not by gymnastics, for experience has shown that very few have the patience and resolution to persevere, and those who do continue their use are very liable to produce permanent physical injury from too violent or excessive exercise. *Walking* is open to similar objections; it is too uninteresting to be continued as a daily resource, and when used occasionally is often excessive. Simple exercise for exercise sake soon becomes irksome, and ceases to be beneficial. Armstrong says:—

"He chooses best whose labor entertains
His vacant fancy most; the toil you *hate*
Fatigues too soon, and scarce improves your limbs."

Active sports, such as cricket, ball, and other well-known recreations, are efficient in relieving the restless craving for motion which is evinced by the young, and certainly should be encouraged. They, however, only partially remedy the difficulty; for those who need the exercise the most, are very apt to be the least disposed to engage in it, and even shrink from the sports which the robust children enjoy so much. Would it not be well to advocate the substitution of a regular system of useful manual occupation for mere play, in our various educational institutions? "For not only would the physical organization be thereby strengthened and developed, but the mental energy and dignity of character would be increased, and the mind become better fitted for independent action."

Why should not a portion of the time assigned to the school hours be devoted to practical instruction in some of the mechanical arts for boys after arriving at a proper age, and in some corresponding occupation for girls? * Does any one doubt that both would have a

* The girl who can solve a problem in Algebra, and who cannot readily perform the ordinary household duties, will probably prove to be a more pitiable than valuable member of society.

better knowledge not only of how to make themselves useful in life, but even of the branches which they have studied in books, for their bodies as well as their minds would thus be invigorated. It is true, all cannot practise the mechanical arts, but will not all be better educated for being acquainted with them? Whether this suggestion of combining manual with intellectual education be considered Utopian, or really practical, it is certainly highly important to bear in mind that in education the muscular system, as well as the intellectual, imperatively demands exercise; and that without it there must necessarily be decay. It behooves us also to remember that violent and fitful exercise, occasionally, is by no means to be recommended; for instance, a long walk or a great effort at rowing after a week of inactivity. This is nothing new, for Galen inveighs against violent exercise in gymnastics; and Dr. Combe, in speaking of students and other sedentary persons in his own country, says, "It is no unusual thing for youths, still weak from rapid growth, and perhaps accustomed to the desk, to set out in high spirits at the rate of twenty or twenty-five miles a day on a walking excursion, and (in consequence of carrying exercise to that degree in which *waste exceeds nutrition*) to come home so much worn out and debilitated that they *never* recover."

In this climate, where three fourths of the disorders to which the constitution is liable are said to be considerably influenced by aerial transitions, and the chief defence against the atmospherical changes is clothing, the subject of *dress* demands much attention. *Men* seem to be very willing to conform themselves in their dress to the peculiarities of the climate, and to allow fashion and common sense to have some affinity with each other. It is not always so with the gentler sex, for they often clothe themselves and their children more as if they were endeavoring to ascertain how much abuse the constitution would endure, than merely to give protection with suitable garments.—There is still reason to believe that female dress errs in one important particular, even when unexceptionable in quantity and material. Notwithstanding all the lecturing upon this subject in past times, the dress being made to fit too closely on the upper part of the body, is now, we fear as much as ever, considered to be essential to the good looks of young and middle aged women. Too frequently, the ribs are compressed and the form distorted by tight lacing, and when, as is often the case, this is commenced before full growth has been attained, the capacity designed for the lungs and some of the abdominal organs is permanently and seriously diminished, and muscular action paralyzed. If we could read a revelation of the number of those whose lives have been made miserable, and health destroyed by this error, either directly or by the fault of parents, we should doubtless be overcome with astonishment. This, associated as it often is, with the expansive hoops which tend to deprive the lower extremities of the protection which they require, leads one often to

wonder at the endurance of the female constitution. In a severe winter wind ladies are sometimes left with scarcely any other protection for the lower limbs than thin cotton.

As for young children, in viewing their dresses cut low in the neck, and so short as to expose the legs from the knees downwards, we see one of the fertile sources of mortality. It seems, however, that, in some instances at least, it requires more than *even a physician's* authority to correct this evil; for one lady, whose attention was called to the insufficiency of her children's dress, by her medical attendant who had often been called to prescribe for bronchitis and tonsillitis in the family, remarked, she herself had lived through it when a child, and she thought *her children* might. Important as it is, that children should be sufficiently clothed, and that their dress should be adequate to protecting the body from an abiding sensation of cold, we must not forget that warmth is not to be sought in clothing alone. If too much dependence is placed upon an excess of thick clothing, exercise, which is another essential means of warmth, is impeded and rendered too fatiguing. By such excess, also, the system is rendered susceptible of injury from the slightest accidental exposures or variations of temperature and moisture; and to an extent equal to that caused by living in rooms heated to too high a temperature.

I have thus endeavored to draw the attention of this Society to a few of the most important influences upon health and disease; and imperfect as my effort may have proved, if any of these suggestions should lead to a more thorough consideration of the subjects discussed, or tend to more satisfactory conclusions with regard to any of them, our time will not have been lost.

